
Land Use & City Form

HOUSING
COMMERCE
INDUSTRY



The visual and functional character of El Paso is defined by the pattern and extent of its present urban uses. Physical constraints of the Franklin Mountains, the Rio Grande, and the proximity to state and international borders have been, and will remain, major influences on the development patterns of the City. Geographically, El Paso is larger and more varied than other cities in the region, and has significant socio-economic diversity. It faces complex problems that may only be solved by encouraging innovative solutions. The questions of how much future population and economic growth should be accommodated in the City to the year 2025, and where and when growth should occur, are fundamental issues addressed. A basic premise of *The Plan* is that growth can be planned and directed to achieve beneficial ends, and that the magnitude and location of growth is of direct concern to the residents, businesses and taxpayers of El Paso. The City's ability to provide necessary urban services also impacts how much development should be accommodated and where it should be distributed. The City must be fiscally healthy if it is to be able to provide the services needed at adequate levels.

Under this context, land use planning provides a necessary framework to guide development and redevelopment. In order to develop a balanced and complete community, concerns with quality of life and the livability of El Paso are expressed through arrangement of its residential, commercial and industrial land uses. Collectively, *The Plan* is directed toward making El Paso a distinct place that provides a wide variety of opportunities for living and working, as well as enjoying cultural and recreational pastimes.

DISTRIBUTION OF LAND USE

Of the 247 square miles (158,080 acres) of land within the City Limits, approximately eighty-five (85) percent is considered available for urban development. Of this available land, approximately fifty (50) percent has been fully developed. Residential use is by far the most prevalent urban use in the City occupying over 28,000 acres. This residential development is typified by low-density single-family detached housing, much of which is located in homogeneous neighborhoods which are a product of large scale, suburban tract development. Single-family detached housing units make up a majority of the City's housing stock and are characterized by densities ranging up to 14 dwelling units per acre. The remaining housing stock consists of a variety of single-family attached, two-family, and multi-family housing units, which are widely dispersed throughout the City.

Office and commercial development, each taking on a distinctive character, occupy the second largest urban use in the City Limits (more than 6,000 acres). Commercial development exists in the form of neighborhood and community commercial centers, strip commercial development, and regional shopping centers. The downtown area is evolving into a financial, office, cultural and entertainment center. The commercial development pattern has responded to the dispersed residential population. New office and commercial land uses should be located to facilitate convenient shopping and easy access to professional services.

Industrial development occupies just under 6,000 acres of the urban land in El Paso. The industrial areas to the east and west of the City have been the fastest growing since they are the closest to the path of job growth, primarily high technology firms. The City recognizes the value of industrial service/supplier uses and is promoting preservation and creation of new industrial areas within the City Limits. The distribution of industrial lands in the City encourages a more balanced geographic distribution of jobs. Employment-intensive land uses are encouraged to locate close to residential areas, thereby contributing to shorter commute distances.

While there is still a significant amount of undeveloped land suitable for urban uses, the hillsides surrounding

the City are an extensive land resource devoted to non-urban uses. Approximately 54,622 acres of the City's vacant land is considered viable for urban land development. Given the nature of available land resources and the increasing fiscal constraints on the City, land should be used as efficiently as possible.

Figure 9.1
Estimated Acres of Land Use within the El Paso City Limits
Existing & Projected

<i>Land Use</i>	<i>1988</i>	<i>1999</i>	<i>2025</i>
Residential	22,080	28,560	43,874
Office/Commercial	3,136	6,168	13,344
Industrial	4,750	5,828	8,376
Other	37,869	39,158	42,197
Franklin Mountains State Park	23,744	23,744	23,944
Vacant	66,501	54,622	39,145
Total Acres	158,080	158,080	170,880
Developed (Platted) Acres	67,835	79,714	107,791

Assumptions:

1. Base of 1988 developed acres by land use.
2. Total platted acres fully developed.
3. One square mile growth per year to Year 2025.
4. Other represents park and open space, governmental uses, streets and right-of-way, military, etc

CITY FORM

Planning Areas

In planning for future growth, land analyses has been evaluated by geographic area of the City. The five geographic areas are the Northwest, Northeast, Central, East, and Lower Valley. A boundary description, general land use policies, proposed Study Areas, and Year 2025 General Land Use Maps are provided for each of the areas in the **Land Use Concepts Chapter** and the **Map Atlas** of *The Plan* while demographic information by Planning Area is contained in the **Demographics Chapter**.

Study Areas

To permit a more detailed planning of a specific geographic area, study areas have been identified in *The Plan* within each planning area. This process will ensure that the development of the area will proceed according to specific use, design, phasing, and financing provisions tailored to the circumstances of that area. The detail in a study area may vary from a level of analyses consistent with *The Plan* review and policy direction, to a land use level that contains detailed development standards and recommendations. This approach encourages resolution of complex development or redevelopment issues. Three different types of study areas have been evaluated: Activity Center, Activity Corridor, and Special Strategy Area. *The Plan* locates areas suitable for these concepts as described below.

Activity Centers

Activity centers are groupings of land uses that radiate from most intense to least intense, and are generally located at intersections of arterial streets. At the core of an activity center would be more intensive land uses, followed by least intensive land uses that would act as a buffer to abutting land uses. This concept provides an opportunity, both in new development and redevelopment areas, to centrally locate employment centers, medical offices, shopping, financial establishments, and other such land uses serving housing areas. These activity centers are self-contained and provide for an attractive standard of architectural and site design quality. Activity centers permit centers containing a mixture of commercial and industrial land uses (most-intensive), to a center containing institutional uses with neighborhood office and commercial developments (least-intensive).

Five characteristics, at a minimum, are essential for activity centers to be effective and functional. They should:

- Concentrate economic establishments within the center core;
- Provide some housing opportunities in the form of a development mix;
- Facilitate the movement of people and goods;
- Enhance the quality of life in the area; and,
- Functionally connect its mixture of land uses through sensitive design treatments.

Activity Corridors

Activity corridors are areas which are located primarily along arterial streets and which contain complementary land uses. These corridors are generally referred to as strip-commercial areas that provide goods and services on a regional scale or to multi-neighborhoods. These corridors predominantly serve a mixture of non-specialized commercial land uses, and are served by freestanding establishments. The primary focus of these corridors is to integrate a mixture of land uses that will not be intrusive to nearby residential neighborhoods, to minimize vehicle/pedestrian conflicts, to encourage coordination of streetscape and storefront beautification, and to encourage functional identity and focus.

Special Strategy Areas

Special strategy areas are properties that have been identified to coordinate the development or redevelopment efforts due to the uniqueness of the area, the nature of the land uses, the potential for cooperative change, and the complexity of the land use linkages which warrant use of specific developmental strategies. These areas are generally designated for mixed-use development due to the integration of land use combinations requiring maximum flexibility and lending themselves to special opportunities. Site specific land use regulations may be required to overcome on-site considerations.

LAND USE DESIGNATIONS

The proposed land uses for all property within the El Paso City Limits are depicted in the Year 2025 General Land Use Maps for each planning area in the **Map Atlas**. These land use designations reflect a general evaluation of the City's future urban character, and include a range of allowable land uses and development intensities. Used in conjunction with the statement of development goals, policies, and actions of *The Plan*, and separate policy documents and study area plans subsequently integrated into *The Plan*, the designations represent the official policy framework for decision-making regarding the physical development of the City. General in scope, they identify major categories of land use and are not intended to denote a specific or comprehensive list of permissible uses. In some cases, the text included in *The Plan* may serve to define specific conditions under which a specific land use or a density—other than that designated on a Year 2025 General Land Use Map—may be allowed.



Above: San Jacinto Plaza, Downtown.

The land uses shown on Year 2025 General Land Use Maps are not, in all cases, reflective of the existing zoning of property. In such cases, the designation identified on these maps shall indicate the future general land use category the City considers most appropriate. The land uses are not intended as a parcel-specific mapping of proposed land uses, but rather as the predominant category of general land use in the area. The Year 2025 General Land Use Maps will be used as the major implementation tool for carrying out the development review processes (primarily zoning and subdivision platting) of the City. Revisions to the land use designations shown within the Year 2025 General Land Use Maps may occur as part of recommendations of a study area plan, the rezoning process, or zoning analyses for properties annexed into the City Limits.

Parks and Open Space

This land use designation is applied to lands that are primarily devoted to recreational and open space use. Facilities, such as parks, greenbelts, golf courses, and hiking-jogging paths, provide essential amenities and are distributed throughout the City. This designation also applies to environmentally sensitive lands, such as lands having certain geologic conditions, watershed and prime percolation soil areas, natural habitats, aquifer storage and recovery areas, and major flood control facilities, to be preserved from the encroachment of

more intensive forms of development. Low intensity suburban land uses, having little physical impact on the land and requiring minimal or no urban facilities or services, are appropriate in this category. Projects developed under this designation should be designed to enhance the open space character and to preserve the aesthetic qualities of the area.

Residential

Below: Residential development.

This land use designation sets forth a range of residential types and densities necessary to ensure a sufficient supply of housing to accommodate future population growth within the City. Each residential land use category identified below describes the maximum density range allowed by that category. These densities are based on gross acreage, which is defined as the area of land available for development



before deducting areas necessary for streets, utilities, and other infrastructure needed to accommodate the development (typically twenty-five percent of the gross acreage). The zoning process identifies the specific allowable residential land uses, development intensities and standards for each category described below.

Low Density Residential

The least intensive category of residential land use, low density residential is intended primarily for single-family dwellings ranging up to seven (7) units per acre. This designation supports a suburban/urban interface, permitting developments utilizing a large lot “estate” concept, hillside developments of low intensity due to topographical or geologic considerations, standard dwelling unit types, and non-traditional subdivisions of varying lot and house sizes. Access is encouraged from local street classifications, with nearby collector arterial street access to serve the neighborhood.

Medium Density Residential

This category is intended for dwellings ranging from 7.1 to 20 units per acre. This designation allows for a mixture of housing types, including single-family, two-family, and multi-family dwellings. It is generally located on the periphery of low-density single-family neighborhoods and other infill sites as a transition to higher intensity land uses. Access is encouraged along higher order local street classifications, with direct arterial street access to nearby major activity centers or corridors.

High Density Residential

This category is intended for very dense residential development of 20.1 or more units per acre, and allows for a mixture of housing types and intensity. Multi-story high apartment complexes or condominiums typify this density, which may also be characterized by small lot patio homes, townhouses or other housing types. The development of business and professional office uses is permitted within this category, and may be integrated to complement residential projects. Arterial street access on or near major activity centers or corridors is encouraged for high-density residential and office use locations.

Commercial

This land use designation is intended to identify locations for commercial development types, with varying design components, which function within the City. The intensity of commercial development permitted is identified under each category below. Intensity of specific commercial uses shall be determined by the capacity of each site to accommodate the activities, including parking and vehicular access, associated with the use or uses of the site as part of the development review process.

Neighborhood Commercial

This category applies to commercial land uses that serve neighborhoods. These commercial land uses contribute to neighborhood identity by serving as a focus for neighborhood activity, and are typically small-scale retail and service establishments. It may include a small commercial corridor, or one (1) or more freestanding commercial establishments. Within this designation, residential, office and light commercial uses are considered complementary uses. These light commercial developments are encouraged along collector or higher order arterial streets, and should incorporate pedestrian oriented design features.

Community Commercial

This category is intended to permit miscellaneous commercial land uses serving several neighborhoods within a planning area. The commercial land uses permitted are larger in scale and require a case-by-case evaluation to ascertain compatibility with adjacent land uses. This category is typified by one (1) or more large specialty commercial centers. These developments usually require vehicular travel to access them, and are encouraged along minor or higher order arterial streets.



Above: Neighborhood commercial site.

Regional Commercial

This category permits the most intensive of commercial land uses serving the City and adjacent communities. Developments are typified by large-scale facilities having both commercial and light industrial characteristics. Such land uses are high traffic generators, and are encouraged along major or higher order arterial streets.

Industrial

The industrial land use designation is intended to accommodate a mixture of compatible commercial and industrial uses. Development intensities are likely to vary considerably based on the use, ownership, design, street and other infrastructure capacities, and occupancy needs, and will be considered as part of the development review process. Primary measures to be used in determining permitted land use intensities will be employment density and building intensity. More restrictive standards may be imposed where outdoor activities are associated.

Light Industry

This is the least intensive category in terms of permitted uses, required urban services and environmental

effects. Land uses permitted include research, product development and testing, engineering and sales development, research and development, assembly and manufacturing, warehousing and shipping, and other similar uses. Substantial truck traffic is associated with these uses and is encouraged along major or higher order arterial streets, and near supportive transportation networks. Offices, retail sales and service establishments are appropriate ancillary uses.

Heavy Industry

This category is intended for industrial uses with nuisance or hazardous characteristics, which for reasons of health, safety or environmental effects are best, segregated from other uses. Extractive and primary processing industries are typical of permitted developments. Designations are appropriate for sites that have access to a major or higher order arterial street, and which are within close proximity to rail or other transportation networks. Locations would be subject to stringent development standards to overcome any adverse effects on surrounding properties.

Mixed Use

This land use designation permits development of one (1) or more of the three major land use categories - residential, commercial, and industrial. It provides a choice of land use combinations that provide an opportunity for maximum flexibility and which encourage the development of innovative projects. The mix of land uses and their intensities are functionally connected to create cohesive development that is independently viable. Direct linkages to land uses should be accommodated through the use of open space and landscaped areas.

Mixed-use projects may be configured as integrated projects, stacked uses, or individual buildings with single uses. Development within this designation is intended to expand the potential for residential development in close proximity to employment centers and public transit, and to encourage redevelopment and infill opportunities.

Mixes of residential and commercial uses are allowed at higher intensities to maximize the development opportunities of these locations. Development of a residential mix should encompass diverse housing densities, types and ownership patterns. This designation facilitates new development, but also provides for the retention and integration of existing land uses.



Left and Above: Examples of Mixed use development.

CITY-WIDE LAND USE GOALS AND POLICIES

The goals and policies for this section are as follows: a) land use and city form; b) residential; c) commercial and office; d) industrial; and, e) neighborhoods.

Land Use and City Form

GOAL: **DEVELOP A BALANCED AND COMPLETE COMMUNITY WHICH CONTAINS A MIX OF LAND USES AND DENSITIES, HOUSING TYPES AND STYLES, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, JOB OPPORTUNITIES, EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES, AND OUTLETS FOR SOCIAL AND CULTURAL EXPRESSION.**

POLICY: **Develop land use patterns that protect neighborhoods while supporting the economic viability of the city.**

ACTION: Maintain development standards that protect residential neighborhoods from uses that increase traffic and noise, reduce privacy, and adversely affect the health, safety and welfare of residents.

ACTION: Encourage the use of public, private, and non-profit resources to redevelop and/or rehabilitate residential, commercial, and industrial areas where necessary.

ACTION: Foster the participation of residents in the land use decision-making process.

ACTION: Vary residential densities, housing types, and styles, so they are equitably and appropriately distributed throughout the community.

ACTION: Promote development agreements for shared public facilities.

ACTION: Maintain, upgrade, and preserve existing neighborhoods by updating city codes and ordinances.

ACTION: Promote landscaping as an integral part of any development.

POLICY: **Develop activity centers which provide employment opportunities, residential and commercial developments, community and educational facilities, and leisure activities, all served by multimodal transportation systems, including mass transit.**

ACTION: Encourage the location of high density residential uses near mass transit lines and other major transportation facilities.

ACTION: Promote the revitalization of the downtown area and historic districts throughout the City.

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- POLICY:** Encourage development to locate where it can be demonstrated that access and utilities can be provided in accordance with development standards.
- ACTION:** Maintain adequate levels of public services to serve new development.
- ACTION:** Encourage and promote increased coordination between developers and public entities to address the impacts of large scale developments on public services and facilities.

Residential

GOAL: PROVIDE AND ENFORCE STANDARDS FOR PROVIDING DECENT, SAFE AND SANITARY HOUSING FOR ALL EL PASOANS IN ACCORDANCE WITH FEDERAL, STATE AND LOCAL REGULATIONS.

POLICY: Promote fair housing opportunities which allow each person to obtain housing without regard to race, color, sex, religion, or national origin.



POLICY: Locate housing developments for elderly residents within walking distance of retail and service centers, community facilities, medical facilities, and/or transportation facilities.

ACTION: Revise and strengthen the fair housing policy of the City.

ACTION: Allow manufactured or mobile home development as an alternative housing type in all housing density ranges.

GOAL: PROVIDE A WIDE RANGE OF HOUSING TYPES THAT RESPOND TO THE NEEDS OF ALL ECONOMIC SEGMENTS OF THE COMMUNITY.

POLICY: Encourage innovative home design and development to promote housing opportunities.

ACTION: Distribute high residential densities throughout the community.

ACTION: Provide adequate open space, either in private yards or common areas, in all residential developments.

POLICY: Encourage use of planned unit developments which integrate private amenities.

GOAL: PROTECT RESIDENTIAL AREAS FROM INCOMPATIBLE LAND USES AND ENCROACHMENT WHICH MAY HAVE A NEGATIVE IMPACT ON THE RESIDENTIAL LIVING ENVIRONMENT.

ACTION: Rehabilitate deteriorated housing units or replace housing units that are not suited for habitation.

ACTION: Employ development standards to protect residential environments.

Commercial and Office

GOAL: PROVIDE A PATTERN OF COMMERCIAL AND OFFICE DEVELOPMENT WHICH BEST SERVES COMMUNITY NEEDS AND WHICH COMPLEMENTS AND SERVES ALL OTHER LAND USES.

Below: Office park.



POLICY: Encourage new development as cluster and corridor concepts in place of strip commercial development.

ACTION: Follow design and location guidelines for shopping centers and office developments.

ACTION: Encourage the implementation of shared driveways, joint parking areas, and rear or side parking locations in commercial and office development.

POLICY: Locate community and regional commercial centers at major arterial intersections and ensure their compatibility with adjacent land uses.

ACTION: Encourage upgrading, beautification, and revitalization of commercial areas and shopping centers.

POLICY: Locate new commercial development near existing employment or population centers or in close proximity to transit facilities, pedestrian, and bicycle access.

Industrial

GOAL: PROVIDE DESIGNATED LOCATIONS FOR INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT THAT DO NOT ADVERSELY AFFECT THE HEALTH, SAFETY, AND WELFARE OF THE COMMUNITY AND WHERE ESSENTIAL INFRASTRUCTURE IS AVAILABLE TO SERVE THE DEVELOPMENT.

POLICY: Designate locations for industrial development in each planning area that reduce travel time to work and provide access to public transportation.

ACTION: Follow design and location guidelines for industrial development

ACTION: Discourage access to industrial development through residential areas

POLICY: Encourage the development of new industrial areas and the redevelopment of existing older or marginal industrial areas, particularly in locations which facilitate efficient commute patterns.

ACTION: Allow recreational, educational, community, and service commercial facilities to locate in light industrial and office parks



Neighborhoods

GOAL: PRESERVE, PROTECT, AND ENHANCE THE INTEGRITY, ECONOMIC VITALITY AND LIVABILITY OF THE CITY'S NEIGHBORHOODS.

POLICY: Provide neighborhoods with safe and efficient vehicular and pedestrian circulation systems.

ACTION: Encourage connectivity of neighborhoods through the use of bikeways, pedestrian walkways and open spaces.

ACTION: Encourage neighborhood associations to collaborate with the City in its land development process.

ACTION: Limit arterial street access for single-family and duplex residential development.

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- POLICY:** Community facilities should be equitably distributed to the extent feasible throughout the City.
- ACTION:** Encourage neighborhood amenities that include places for interaction among residents such as parks, community centers, schools, commercial areas, churches, and other gathering points throughout the City.
- ACTION:** Public and private development should be designed to improve the character of existing neighborhoods.
- ACTION:** Encourage neighborhood park and ride commuter facilities within neighborhood commercial centers.
- GOAL:** ENCOURAGE THE PROVISION OF NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL SERVICES WHICH ARE COMPATIBLE WITH A NEIGHBORHOOD'S RESIDENTIAL CHARACTER.
- POLICY:** Promote mixed uses within designated neighborhoods.
- POLICY:** Locate neighborhood commercial centers within walking distance of residences and on mass transit routes.
- POLICY:** Community facilities should be equitably distributed to the extent feasible throughout the City.
- POLICY:** Encourage neighborhood amenities that include places for interaction among residents such as parks, community centers, schools, commercial areas, churches, and other gathering points throughout the City.
- POLICY:** Public and private development should be designed to improve the character of existing neighborhoods.
- POLICY:** Encourage neighborhood park and ride commuter facilities within neighborhood commercial centers.